



Video Story Transcript

Columbian Runaway: A Latina Pushes Back on the Role of Women

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fG9zg-jAUfc>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, my name is Jasmin Cardenas. I have been in Chicago all my life. But in 2006, I took off to Columbia, South America, panicked because I'd gotten engaged a month and a half before, and the bombardment of questions about my dress, the rings, the wedding, the location, it was just all too much. I didn't know the answers. And it felt like the more I got asked, the more I lost myself in the answering. The questions came from everywhere.

One of the Senoras from church asked, "Jasmin, are you going to have niños right away?"

"No, I want to figure out how my new life partner and I work first. But I..."

"Si, quierro niños, just not right away."

One of my party girlfriends asks, "So, are you sure you're ready to settle down, Jazz?"

"Yes. It's what I've always envisioned."

Then one of my colleagues from work asks, "So, you gonna take his name?"

"Nuñez...and trade in my own? No!"

"Who's Jasmin Nuñez? She doesn't have a history, a story, an actor's union card. Jasmin Cardenas does. Am I too selfish to think that way?"

It's just that all my life, I've been groomed by my mother, my aunts, and Latino society in general, to be una mujer buena, a good woman. A good Latina woman takes care of her husband, serves him, cooks for him...Oh, I'm so in trouble. Cooking? Baking I can do. But cooking...I can't cook to save my life.

I mean, my mom and my aunts, especially my Tia Gloria, they are the model image of mujer buena. You can't turn on Spanish network TV without seeing your stereotypical Latinas. Mujeres, women, who take care of their husbands. My mom, I've watched all my life, wake up and make my dad's breakfast and coffee, down to the sugar in his café.

You, I mean, maybe estoy loca. Was this really what I wanted? Was I signing up for this? I knew that I loved Jesus but I'd broken my one cardinal rule. You don't even talk engagement unless you've been dating for at least a year. And here I was engaged in less than 10 months. When he asked me to marry him, I did not question it. I practically jumped into his lap.

Okay, so what you need to know is that Jesus took me to Mexico under the guise of meeting his familia. And then he took me on a secluded, romantic trip to a rain forest. A lush rain forest, fragrant with life. Butterflies darting around the canopy of trees and vines. And we walked along these pebbles stones, past one rushing waterfall after another. And we had the place all to ourselves. When we got to the base of the most majestic waterfall, El Capitán, I looked at Jesus and he looked a little nervous. But I was just so overwhelmed by the beauty. And then he got down on one knee. And I thought, "Oh my, it's happening. It's happening. Memorize this moment, Jasmin. Memorize this moment."

And then his lips parted. "Will you marry me?"

"Yes! Yes!" I jumped into his arms and threw my arms around him as the waterfall cascaded down and we kissed. Our own movie moment.

But standing here, in my aunt's kitchen, in Columbia, so many days away from that moment of clarity, I couldn't help but wonder. Watching her, in her tile kitchen, in her high heels, at 6 o'clock in the morning, with her jeans suction-cupped to her tush. Is serving a man the rest of my life really what I wanted? Is my college degree going to become a paper doily?

Now, what's crazy is that Jesus had never given me a reason to think that I was going to end up barefoot and pregnant during our, all of our marriage. He's a first generation American, just like me. A well-educated Mexican guy. He's not machista. A machista is a guy who likes to put a woman in her place, who likes to be taken care of by women. Jesus is not like that.

But what if it's in his DNA? And we haven't been together long enough, for me to see signs of it creeping out, and then he expects me to be his mama! No. Jesus is really quite awesome. I won't want to marry him if he wasn't. So why was I so nervous and freaking out about this new role as his wife? I mean, it's not like when my mom was a kid. You know, my mom never got to learn how to ride a bike when she was a little girl, because little girls weren't allowed to ride bikes. And when I was young, I learned the same message.

I was walking down, uh, town, in one of those small little Latin American towns, with my prima, my cousin and we saw an arcade room. It was just ooo... you know. Concrete floors and a few pinball machines but they had Pac-Man, so, I went right in. And all the boys inside stopped and stared at me. I didn't know what I'd done wrong. And then, I realized my prima, she had stayed outside. I was the only girl in the arcade room and the boys said that I couldn't be there. That it wasn't proper for a girl to be in an arcade room. Man, where's the manual to be your own Columbiana Americana?

That morning, in Columbia, my aunt prepared my uncle's breakfast, down to the sugar in his café. He left through that toll... tall, wrought iron gate. There was a dog barking and a fruit vendor. "Mamay! Platanos! Y Yuuucccaa!"

And my aunt turns around, after having locked the padlock door, and she looks at me. And I must look like a scared little girl because she's like, "Jasmin, que le pasa mija?"

"Nothing. Nothing is wrong, Tia."

"Jasmin."

"Tia, yo no puedo cocinar, I don't know how to cook. I don't like to clean. And the idea of serving a guy until the end of my days like a good mujer Latina should, makes me want to jump off a cliff."

(Laughter) "Ay boba!" My aunt looked at me and she said, "Ay, muchacha. Usted no se tiene que preocupar por eso, you don't have to worry about that. You prepared yourself for more than that. Ay, Jasmin."

"Pero Tia, I thought I was supposed to take care of my husband the way you and Mami do. Taking care of him, cooking and cleaning."

"Jasmin, you prepared yourself for more than that. Your mom, she didn't have the choices you have. You studied. Your mama was a worker, una tradajadora. And she had to work, to support la familia. And she sacrificed leaving Columbia to go to the United States so that you would have all those choices. Just to hire someone to do all the cooking and cleaning for you."

"Really?" My jaw hit the ground. "Pero Tia, I thought I was supposed to make Jesus feel like a man like you and Mami make el Tio and Papi feel like a man."

"Jasmin, we make your father and your Tio feel like men in these little ways, but they know who the boss is. They go to work but we get a paycheck."

Wow. I guess I just needed somebody else to tell me what my mom has always told me. Estudie y sace su carrera para que nunca tenga que depender de un hombre. Study and pursue your career so you never have to depend on a man. That conversation with my Tia Gloria, was all the talk I needed. There's lots of different ways to be una mujer buena, a good woman.

I got home, back to Chicago, and Jesus asked, "Babe, is everything OK?" And I assured him that was.

And nine months later, we stood in our own outdoor, jungle wedding, surrounded by our friends and familia in Mexico. And Jesus standing there, in his white linen suit, and I, in my Princess Diana dress and veil, just like my mother always envisioned. And the pastor said, "I now present to you, Jesus Nuñez and Jasmin Cardenas."

Thank you.

